

Workforce Supply

- **Unemployment is low, but the region has a 33,750-strong available labor pool, that includes 28,700 underemployed workers who are looking for better jobs.**

The underemployed are willing to commute farther and longer. For the one-way commute, 50 percent are prepared for 20 or more minutes longer and 35 percent will go 20 or more extra miles. Underemployment ranged from 21.6 percent for Lee County to 32.8 percent for Macon County. Lee County has the largest available labor and Bullock County has the smallest.

Labor Force	112,896
Employed	107,836
Underemployment rate	26.6%
Number of underemployed workers	28,684
Unemployed	5,060
Available labor pool	33,744

Note: Based on August 2005 labor force data.

Source: Center for Business and Economic Research, The University of Alabama and Alabama Department of Industrial Relations.

- **In 2000, about 30,500 workers commuted out of the region for work, compared to 10,650 in-commuters.**

Eighty percent of the outflow was to Georgia. All counties, except Bullock, had net commuter outflows. Significant commuting within the region suggests that the roads and highways must be maintained properly to ensure uninterrupted movement of workers as impeded movement of workers can slow economic development.

The one-way commute takes less than 20 minutes for 56 percent of workers, but more than 40 minutes for 11 percent, with 2 percent taking more than an hour. The commute is less than 10 miles for 43 percent of workers; about 21 percent travel more than 25 miles one-way and almost 5 percent exceed 45 miles.

- **Region 8 has lower educational attainment than and comparable population growth to the state.**

Of the age 25 and over population, 75 percent are high school graduates and 19 percent hold bachelor's or higher

degrees in Alabama, compared to 73 percent and 18.5 percent, respectively, for Region 8. Lee County stands out with 81 percent high school graduates and 28 percent bachelor's or higher degree holders. All the other counties have lower educational attainment than the state. Population rose 1.1 percent from 2000-2004, while growing 1.9 percent for the state. The 2000-2010 projected population growth is 11.8 percent for the region and 8.8 percent for Alabama.

Workforce Demand

- **By sector, the top five employers in the region are manufacturing; educational services; retail trade; health care and social assistance; and accommodation and food services.**

These five industries provided 45,570 jobs, 67 percent of the region total in the second quarter of 2004. Two of the leading employers—manufacturing and educational services—had higher average monthly wages than the \$2,361 regional average.

- **On average about 3,500 jobs were created per quarter from second quarter 2001 to second quarter 2004; average quarterly net job flows was 325.**

Job creation is the number of new jobs that are created either by new area businesses or expansion of existing firms. Net job flows reflect the difference between current and previous employment at all businesses.

- **Three occupations are both high-demand and fast-growing: Customer Service Representatives; Receptionists and Information Clerks; and Food Preparation Workers.**

The top five high-demand occupations are Cashiers; Retail Salespersons; Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers; Waiters and Waitresses; and General and Operations Managers. The top five fast-growing occupations are Personal and Home Care Aides; Pharmacists; Home Health Aides; Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers; and Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education.

- **The top 50 highest earning occupations are mainly in health, management, computer, legal, engineering, and postsecondary education fields.**

Almost all high-earning occupations require bachelor's or higher degrees. Of the top ten high-earning occupations, four are in health and four are in management.

- **Fast-growing or high-demand occupations are generally not high-earning.**

Of 29 selected high-demand, nine selected fast-growing, and 50 selected high-earning occupations, only one occupation—General and Operations Managers—is both high-earning and in high-demand. One occupation, Pharmacists, is both high-earning and fast-growing.

Workforce Investment Advisory Areas



- Employment is currently growing faster than the labor force.

Implications for Workforce Development

- **The region's labor force must grow faster to meet workforce demand either by increasing the participation rate, growing population, or both.**

Higher employment demand might reduce commuter outflow while challenging workforce development. Initiatives addressing this challenge might (i) focus on hard-to-serve populations (e.g. out-of-school youth and illiterate adults), (ii) facilitate in-commuting, and (iii) help communities gain new residents, especially since increasing the number of residents is generally more beneficial to communities than in-commuting. Hard-to-serve populations are often outside of the mainstream economy, poor, and have difficulty finding work. They are potential labor force participants and investment in training, transportation, child care, infrastructure, etc. may be needed to tap this resource.

- **Economic development should target high-earning industries and workforce development should ensure availability of workers for such industries.**

High-demand and high-growth occupations are common to the leading, but not very high wage, employment sectors. Economic development should aim to diversify and strengthen the regional economy by retaining, expanding, and attracting more high-wage providing industries. Workforce development efforts should prepare workers for these industries.

- **Training in basic skills is very important, but high-earning jobs need resource management, complex problem solving, and systems skills as well.**

Basic skills are important for high-demand, high-growth, and high-earning jobs. This indicates a strong need for training in such skills. Ideally, all high school graduates should possess basic skills so that postsecondary and higher education can focus on other and more complex skills while enhancing these basic skills. Employers should be an integral part of planning for training as they can help to identify future skill needs and any existing gaps.

- **A highly educated and productive workforce is a critical economic development asset.**

Skill and education requirements for jobs keep rising. There is therefore a very strong need to raise educational attainment in the region. Although this presents challenges to workforce development, it also provides opportunities for economic development through workforce development activities that involve postsecondary and higher education institutions. Higher incomes to graduates from these institutions would help to raise personal income for the region. Raising personal income by improving educational attainment and technological skills for the region is an effective economic development strategy. Thus, workforce development should continuously educate individuals, the public, and legislators about the private and social returns from education. This strategy will encourage individuals to seek to raise their own educational attainment level and also promote public support for education.

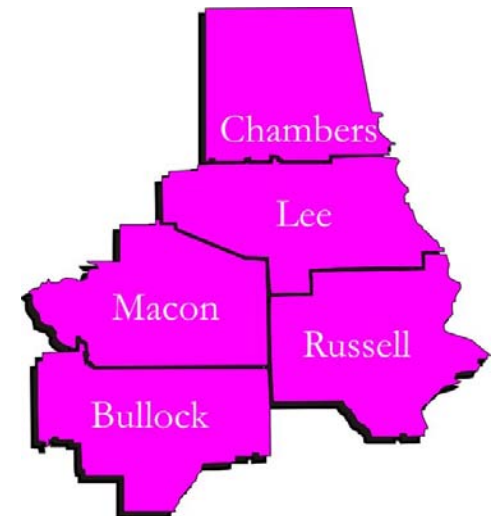
- **Ongoing worker retraining programs should be continued and enhanced.**

This point is noted in the WIAA Region 8 2005 regional advisory council's annual report with a call for funding for various programs. Alabama has a number of tools to assess, retrain, and place dislocated workers, especially those affected by outsourcing. These programs should be continued to ensure that the labor force participation rate does not fall.

- **Together, workforce development and economic development can build a strong and well-diversified regional economy. Indeed, one cannot achieve success without the other.**

WIAA Region 8

Workforce Report I Summary, 2005



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